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## College of Education News

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# Meet the new director of EAGLE Academy

November 18, 2019

## **Open house with meet and greet and information sessions on Nov. 19**



*Julie Pickens, Ph.D.*

Julie Pickens, Ph.D., is the new director of the EAGLE Academy, the Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Program at Georgia Southern University. The EAGLE Academy will host a meet and greet with Pickens and program volunteers on Tuesday, Nov. 19, in the College of Education (COE), room 3156, on the Statesboro Campus, from 6 to 8 p.m. The event will also serve as an open house with information sessions at 6:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Pickens, who previously served as a limited-term faculty member at Georgia Southern from 2015 to 2017, most recently was employed at the Savannah College of Art and Design. There she served as the head of the Jump Start program, which provides an extended orientation to increase awareness of services and resources to students with disabilities, ease their transition to the university and provide strategies for success.

“I was so excited to have the opportunity to return to Georgia Southern and to be a part of EAGLE Academy,” said Pickens. “EAGLE Academy was just getting started when I left in 2017, and it is so great to see the program it is becoming

and to help grow it.”

Pickens completed a Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she served as a pre-service teacher supervisor and guest lecturer. She also holds a graduate-level certificate and licensure in rehabilitation counseling, a master’s in public and nonprofit management, and a bachelor’s in political science and public administration.

Her research focuses on transition-age students with severe disabilities, community-based instruction and employment support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“I have always had a passion and interest in assisting transition-age students,” said Pickens. “It is such an exciting and scary time in the lives of all students, but especially students with disabilities. There are so many changes happening in their lives and so many skills to target as students have the opportunity to be their own best advocate and make the life they want for themselves.”

EAGLE Academy, named for its commitment to Equal Access to Gainful Learning and Employment, is a comprehensive transitional program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Unique to most programs of their kind, Georgia Southern EAGLE Academy students are given a custom-built academic program based on their interests, giving the students the same opportunity that others on campus have to take courses for credit and work toward their career goals. Students also live on campus, allowing them to become fully immersed in campus life and have easy access to all campus amenities. Finally, students enrolled in the program are also trained for employment through internships or paid jobs which are secured with the assistance of the Academy’s team.

For more information, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/eagle-academy/>.

Posted in [COE Events](#), [Faculty Highlights](#)

## Georgia Southern graduate students' presentation, '23 and 1,' at national conference draws from personal experience, advocates for reform for young, black men

November 18, 2019



*Nehemiah McClendon, M.Ed.*

While Georgia Southern University College of Education alumnus Nehemiah McClendon ('17, '19) was working to complete his M.Ed. in Counselor Education, he partnered with close friend and classmate John Holt to present a case study and counseling philosophy during the National Cross-Cultural Counseling and Education Conference.

"In the multicultural counseling course, students are required to complete an assignment where they identify a social justice issue for which they want to promote systemic change and write a comprehensive analysis including advocacy steps," said Kristen Dickens, Ph.D., assistant professor of counselor education. "Nehemiah and John were in separate sections of the course, but wrote about similar topics that are quite meaningful to them. The common thread was wanting to advocate for young black men in K-12 settings who often are stigmatized and fall into the school-to-prison pipeline stereotype. Knowing how passionate they were about this topic, I invited them to collaborate on creating a presentation for the conference, and I served in a mentorship role."

Their presentation was titled "23 and 1," jargon used to describe prison time where incarcerated individuals spend 23 hours in solitary confinement and only have one hour outside

of their cell.

"I started thinking about the term 23 and one, and I realized how that mirrors an individual who is working with a counselor," said McClendon. "The client is out in the world battling their problems for 23 hours and only has one hour with the counselor or therapist."

McClendon decided to present a case study of Aaron, an individual who has been incarcerated for 20 years. Aaron was the oldest of five children in a single parent household in which their mother worked two jobs to try to provide for the family. Aaron's father was abusive and no longer in contact with the family.

As McClendon described the case study and how to approach this situation, he never revealed to the participants that Aaron was, in fact, his brother.

“The case study was our life,” he said. “A lot of the decisions my brother made were predicated on providing. We didn’t have a male provider, and with five mouths to feed, there had to be another source of income.”

High school was not kind to Aaron. He received multiple write-ups for dress code violations, in-class disturbances and excessive absences leading to suspension. These suspensions made Aaron ineligible to play basketball, which kept him engaged and provided him a sense of belonging. The need for income for the family and the lack of support from school led to Aaron’s involvement in a gang.

“We didn’t have mental health professionals in our schools at that time,” McClendon explained. “And, in our minds, we couldn’t afford services like that. He never received the mental health services he needed.”

“I was really proud of the work they put into the presentation,” said Dickens. “Their message was important to share, and the presentation made an impact on all who attended.”

McClendon’s story is his own but not unique. Recognizing that he could make a difference, McClendon has set out to be the individual that his clients need to help them make the right choices.

“I even talk to teachers and administrators about how this all relates to school culture,” he said. “Students are targeted early. Taking students out of the class and putting them in in-school suspension and silent lunch may not always be the best way. We have to consider the root of their behavior, and in today’s generation, trauma is very prevalent.”

McClendon is currently a counselor working with elementary school children in Jacksonville, Florida, and says that, after working with this population closely for the first time, he realizes how impressionable they are.

“I met with a student recently, and he told me he aspired to be a manager at McDonald’s,” McClendon explained. “This student is eight years old. That age is a time when children dream big, yet his imagination could only stretch down the street from where he goes to school.”

McClendon plans to continue to work as a counselor, but his long-term goal is to become a professor of counselor education, as he constantly works to research and grow the counseling field.

As a clinician, he emphasizes several strategies to work with populations facing adversity and trauma.

“Patience. You have to have patience and understanding that students are not going to come out to you immediately no matter if you look like them or different from them,” McClendon explained. “With trauma, it takes a long time to unpack those stressors and build trust.”

He also stressed the importance of establishing rules early and setting goals.

“It’s about helping to set smart goals for them,” McClendon said. “I ask them to look at long-term goals and the small steps they can take every day to reach those goals, ensuring them that the situation they are experiencing is not forever. It is really a lesson in delayed gratification, which is very difficult for youth to understand.”

For McClendon, there is a motto that he shares with his students, clients and himself: Discipline creates structure. Structure creates success.

Thanks to personal discipline, McClendon continues on the path to help others.

"I'm grateful to advocate for those who are chained inside their 23, whether that is a solitary confinement cell or a broken home, and it is a blessing to be somebody's one," he said.

Posted in [Alumni Highlights](#), [Student Highlights](#)

Tags: [John Holt](#), [Kristen Dickens](#), [M.Ed. Counselor Education](#), [Nehemiah McClendon](#)

## [Teens for Literacy's beginnings in Southeast Georgia](#)

November 18, 2019



*Allen Berger, Ph.D., founder of Teens for Literacy*

Born in upstate New York, Allen Berger, Ed.D., could not have predicted that his life would lead him to inspiring teens to read in the southern city of Savannah, Georgia. He started his teaching career in high schools. After completing his doctorate, Berger began working in higher education, serving as a faculty member at Southern Illinois University and the University of Pittsburgh before he was invited to join the faculty at the University of Alberta, Canada. Berger would then move back to the midwest to accept the position of Heckert Professor of Reading and Writing at Miami University in Ohio where he taught reading courses across all disciplines for nearly two decades.

It was during his tenure at Miami University that he started Teens for Literacy, beginning with three inner-city schools. Teens for Literacy has three goals: (1) allow students to take ownership of improving the reading and writing skills of themselves and others; (2) encourage students to pursue education and growing professionally

after high school; and (3) to have students consider teaching as a profession by working with younger students in the school.

“I just knew I wanted students to reach these goals in any way possible,” said Berger, “and the best way to do that is to encourage student innovation and enhance buy-in from the students as they see their own projects and ideas come to life.”

When Teens for Literacy was founded in 1987, Berger and colleagues focused on providing diverse experiences for the inner-city students of Ohio. For instance, students read about agriculture and then were taken on a field trip to a regional farm where they could connect real-life experiences with the information they read.

Berger traveled the country promoting Teens for Literacy at conferences and sharing information about the program’s progress. As the program grew, and success was noted, word of the Teens for Literacy framework began to spread and be incorporated in schools and institutions across the United States. In 2002, Berger received a request to help consider how his framework could be used in Dade County, Florida, at a juvenile offenders facility to help incarcerated youth to enhance their reading skills and promote the pursuit of education.

When Berger’s career at Miami University was complete, he gave away almost everything he owned, packed his car with the remaining necessities, and made his way to Savannah, a city he fell in love with after one visit for a reading conference.

“The city is marvelous,” he said. “It is friendly, and the culture is captivating.”

Not having much of a plan of what was next, Berger ran into a colleague he had met years before — John Hobe, Ed.D., a former department chair in elementary and special education at Armstrong State University. As fate would have it, Hobe needed a faculty member for reading courses, and Berger was more than happy to oblige.

“It was a three-year appointment, but I actually served four years,” Berger laughed. “And I had a lot of fun.”

Seeing the same opportunity to start cultivating a love of reading among teens in the Savannah-Chatham County area, Berger brought Teens for Literacy to Southeast Georgia.



Two Georgia Southern University College of Education faculty members are currently working with Teens for Literacy.

Anne Katz, Ph.D., is in the eighth year of implementing the program. She ran the program at East Broad Street Elementary School for seven years, and recently she and Vivian Bynoe of the University's Lane Library on the Armstrong Campus, received a grant to collaborate with the Teens for Literacy program at Hubert Middle School. Katz also provides programming support to Claxton Middle School to help with their literacy programming. Additionally, COE's Linda Ann McCall, Ed.D. works as a liaison with the program and is currently working with Isle of Hope K-8 School in Savannah.

"Teens for Literacy looks different everywhere that it has been implemented because it is based on the creativity and imagination of the participants," Berger said. "The adults working with the program help steer the ideas of the teens into academic adventures that will be fun and educational."

Participants in the program are selected by teachers at each school. Many students also volunteer. The students serve as the influencers of the school, helping to craft and tailor literacy events that they feel their peers would enjoy.

An integral part of every Teens for Literacy program is Shadowing Day, where the school participants spend the day on a college campus learning about the college experience.

Thanks to Berger's program and the collaboration with Georgia Southern University, hundreds of students, teachers and administrators have participated in Teens for Literacy.



*Linda Ann McCall, Ed.D. (far right) is pictured with Allen Berger, Ph.D. (middle) and Isle of Hope K-8 School during the Fall 2019 Shadowing Day*



*Anne Katz, Ph.D. (pictured in red) with Claxton Middle and East Broad Street Schools for Shadowing Day in Spring 2019.*

Posted in [Faculty Highlights](#)

Tags: [Allen Berger](#), [Anne Katz](#), [Linda Ann McCall](#), [Teens for Literacy](#)

## Georgia Southern student posthumously awarded state honor

November 18, 2019



On Oct. 29, the Georgia chapter of the American College Personnel Association posthumously awarded Nicole Hilliard, former College of Education (COE) graduate student in the higher education administration program, the Outstanding Student Award.

Presented to master's or doctoral level students preparing for a career in student affairs, recipients of the Georgia College Personnel Association's (GCPA) Outstanding Student Award have demonstrated outstanding scholastic achievement as well as research and scholarly activities in the field.

"Nicole was in the final year of the M.Ed. Higher Education Administration program at Georgia Southern," said Steven Tolman, Ed.D., COE assistant professor of higher education. "She was an exemplary student."

Active in conducting research, Hilliard was a co-author on a study with Tolman that was recently published and accepted for presentation at a national conference in March. Hilliard also served on the executive board of the higher education administration graduate student organization.



A native of New Jersey, Hilliard served as a graduate resident director on the Statesboro Campus of Georgia Southern. She died unexpectedly in September as a result of a medical condition.

“Nicole had a profound impact on the students she worked with in her residence hall,” said Tolman. “Our profession was stronger with her, and Nicole will be missed dearly. As a faculty member, I can only hope that her passion for working with students and love for life will inspire her classmates and spread like wildfire.”

Tolman and colleagues Elise Cain, Ph.D., and Dan Calhoun, Ph.D., along with former classmate Kaitlyn Van Dyk, traveled to the GCPA conference to accept the award on behalf of Hilliard.

GCPA enhances the higher education community through advocacy and support for the holistic development of students. The association leads the state in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge for transformative practices that address emerging issues in higher education.



*In memory of Nichole Hilliard*

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Tags: [Nicole Hilliard](#)